

Greg McPhillips is Arizona's Felony Prosecutor of the Year

KINGMAN – Mohave County Prosecutor Greg McPhillips was named Arizona's Felony Prosecutor of the Year Thursday, Aug. 5, by the Arizona Prosecuting Attorneys' Advisory Council during an annual conference in Tucson.

McPhillips, lead prosecutor for Mohave Area General Narcotics Enforcement Team (MAGNET), handled the successful prosecution of the locally labeled "Picture Perfect" case consisting of 18 defendants.

The Council is "comprised of all the elected county attorneys and representatives from the Supreme Court and the Attorney General's Office," Chief Deputy Mohave County Attorney Jace Zack said. "We are very proud of Greg. Prosecuting the 'Picture Perfect' case was difficult, given the large number of defendants. Greg had to give up his family life and everything else for six months preparing and trying the case. He earned this award with very hard work."

In nominating McPhillips for the honor, Mohave County Attorney Matt Smith wrote concerning the "Picture Perfect" case, "He (McPhillips) indicted 18 defendants and obtained felony convictions against each one.... As the top prosecutor at MAGNET, Greg naturally took on the local wiretap case, working closely with officers and attorney generals to successfully navigate the case from indictment to trial."

According to Smith, McPhillips has been with the County Attorney's Office for 13 years and has extensive



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experience handling major child abuse and sex crimes.

"Greg has also taken his experience in prosecuting child crimes and has exercised his role as supervisor to bring attention to the silent child victims of the drug trade," Smith wrote. "Working with law enforcement, Greg has focused the department on prosecutions of the major dealers and the adults who use and deal drugs in a way that endangers children. He has effectively secured convictions of child abuse in dangerous drug sales cases at trial, highlighting the victims of these 'victimless' crimes."

Rural Mohave County has not, historically, had the resources to do "wire cases very often," McPhillips said. In this case, "The MAGNET officers had information, but could not further their investigation into significant narcotics dealing without a wire. They applied for and were granted a wiretap.

That required them to get the resources to” handle the investigation. “There were nine cell phones that we were up on at different times. Those nine phones probably belonged to four or five people. The investigation took several months. We were on the wire for about a month to a month and a half.

“During that investigation, literally hundreds of people were on these wires,” he said. “A lot of the beginning process was deciding who we were going to prosecute. Ultimately, we decided on 18 people. Obviously, that was a big job for Mohave County – a difficult resource draw for us. It was an important case. These 18 people were all upper-level dealers.”

McPhillips, whose caseload was around 80 cases at the time he took the defendants to trial, said handling such a large case was like “having a second job. I’m lucky to work in this office and lucky to have the people I work with. A lot of the people I work with do a ton of work for very little recognition. We have a great team.”

McPhillips said the County Attorney’s Office is lucky to have good experienced attorneys and enthused young attorneys.

“I think one of the things both (former County Attorney) Bill Ekstrom and Matt Smith are good at is hiring people who have their heads tied on,” he said. “They have brought good people to the county. This is an important job with a lot of personal satisfaction. Matt and Jace are both trial attorneys who still do court duties. They also give us a lot of trust, and I appreciate that.”

Although handling drug cases and child abuse cases are very big jobs, the problems are no worse in Mohave County than anywhere else, McPhillips said. “A specific problem we have in the Southwest is methamphetamine. It is devastating to our communities – and it is moving east.”

He is also very concerned about the “increased abuse of prescription drugs,” he said. “As for drug users, we want to get them treatment. The people who are selling drugs need to be dealt with more strenuously. We want to get them off the street.”

McPhillips went to law school at the University of Toledo in Ohio.

“And I went to undergrad at Wright State University in Ohio,” he said. “I drove out here to check out Arizona after completing law school. I hadn’t passed the bar yet. Bill Ekstrom, who was Mohave County attorney then, was kind enough to talk to me. I moved to Arizona, took the bar and started at La Paz County. I was there for a year and then came to Mohave County.”

McPhillips lives in Kingman with his wife and two daughters.

“My oldest daughter is a senior at Kingman High and about to turn 18,” he said. “My youngest just turned nine and is going to fourth grade. I came from Beaver Creek, Ohio, and I’ve also lived in Phoenix. I really like it here in Kingman. It’s a good place to live and raise a family.”

As for being named Arizona Felony Prosecutor of the Year, McPhillips said, “It is nice that the county is recognized this way. From my perspective, it is good for the county. I’m just honored that Matt and Jace said all those nice things about me.”

“It is great to have Greg in the office every year,” Zack said. “He is one of our top prosecutors and is always willing to do whatever needs to be done.”